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Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General says peace in Middle East requires economic and social development of West Bank and Gaza; appeals to non-governmental organizations to provide generous aid to Palestinian people.

+ Special Envoy Brunner to chair talks on political aspects of Georgian/Abhkaz settlement in Geneva this week.

+ Bosnian Government announces eight-point plan to persuade refugees to return to northern part of Bihac pocket.

+ Secretary-General says humanitarian law has important role to play in conflict prevention.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said that the economic and social development of the West Bank and Gaza is essential to peace-building in the region. He made that comment in a message to the four-day United Nations International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, which began today in Geneva.

The Secretary-General said the beginning of Palestinian self-government meant new responsibilities for the international community. Without development, hopes for peace would turn to despair; without productive and meaningful employment, the young would become restless. Non-governmental organizations had a vital role to play in that regard. They should provide generous assistance to the Palestinian people, in close cooperation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and through Palestinian institutions.

The Secretary-General expressed hope that empowerment measures being finalized by Israel and the PLO would be implemented quickly, and that Palestinians throughout the occupied territories would soon enjoy full autonomy in the areas of health, education, social welfare and taxation. The measures would be milestones on the way to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions, he added.

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The Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Georgia, Edouard Brunner, will chair talks on political aspects of a Georgian/Abhkaz settlement in Geneva this week, according to a United Nations spokesman. He will meet tomorrow with the representative of the Russian Federation, and then with the representative of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Ambassador Brunner will meet with the Georgian and Abkhaz delegations on Wednesday, the spokesman said. The talks are expected to last a week.

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The Bosnian Government today announced an eight-point plan to persuade refugees to return to the northern part of the Bihac pocket, according to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Some 25,000 people loyal to rebel leader Fikret Abdic fled from the Velika Kladusa region to Serb-held areas in neighbouring Croatia after Bihac fell to the Bosnian Government Army nine days ago. Croatian authorities have refused to let the refugees enter territory under their control.

The Bosnian Government agreed to the plan after talks over the weekend with UNPROFOR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United States Ambassador to Croatia. It offers an amnesty for officials loyal to Mr. Abdic; permission for a delegation of refugees to visit Velika Kladusa to assess security conditions; a six-month exemption from the Bosnian Army draft for men of military age; and the establishment of an UNPROFOR-protected refugee centre.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said that humanitarian law had an important role to play in conflict prevention. In a message to the nineteenth round table of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy, he highlighted the need for adequate humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons and refugees. Large population movements could place extreme pressure on receiving communities, creating dangerous tensions and threatening regional stability.

The humanitarian dimension of conflict prevention was also evident in the link between the latter and respect for human rights, the Secretary-General continued. Human rights abuses and other violations of humanitarian law often sparked violence or fueled existing conflicts. Conflict prevention could not succeed where States were unwilling or unable to ensure respect for human rights and humanitarian law, he added.

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